

**Welcome - Christine McDonough**  
**Prelude - Barb Tolman, Piano**

**Chalice Lighting -**

We light this chalice to celebrate Unitarian Universalism  
This is the church of the open mind,  
this is the church of the loving heart,  
this is the church of the helping hands.

**Opening words -**

In mud season, when we're down to turnips, I miss the onions.  
When it was all onions all the time, I missed the potatoes.  
Next year, I promise again, next year it will be one turnip every week,  
So there might be a potato-onion soup in mud season.

It doesn't work that way.

Thank all the gods and farmers and truckers and grocers, I can hop into my car and  
get greens and oranges no matter how they tax my credulity.

These turnips are the turnips in my heart, ancestral turnips.  
They are the turnips of race memory or annual rhythmicity or past lives or the  
Cauldron of Story - pick your explanation. If you are from where I am from, you  
know exactly which turnips I mean.

We love the snow.

We love the snap of cold.

We love the crystals and the diamond-scattered beauty.

And after a certain point, it is turnips and someone tries to tell us about  
resurrection and miracles and we look up from turnip stew to shrug and say, "I  
understand Lent."

But wait! Hush! Listen!

The sap is running!

**- Sparrow F. Alden**

**\*Opening Hymn #57 All Beautiful the March of Days**

Please join together to acknowledge the snow predicted for Wednesday, the Vernal Equinox, by singing Hymn #57: All Beautiful the March of Days (ed: I believe that this lovely 1912 hymn is out of copyright, please correct me if I have erred.)

1. All beautiful the march of days, as seasons come and go;  
the hand that shaped the rose hath wrought the crystal of the snow,  
hath sent the hoary frost of heaven, the flowing waters sealed,  
and laid a silent loveliness on hill and wood and field.
  
2. O'er white expanses sparkling pure the radiant morns unfold;  
the solemn splendours of the night burn brighter through the cold;  
life mounts in every throbbing vein, love deepens round the hearth,  
and clearer sounds the angel hymn, good will to all on earth.
  
3. O thou from whose unfathomed law the year in beauty flows,  
thyself the vision passing by in crystal and in rose;  
day unto day doth utter speech, and night to night proclaim  
in ever changing words of light the wonder of thy name.

In most UU services, we have worship time - with soft ritual, beautiful music, acknowledgment of our community - followed by learning time, usually a choice between sermon and Sunday School. Today we're excited to have our learning time all together in this beautiful space. If this is your first visit, please know that your contributions to active learning are welcome, and that we enjoy a service like this five or six times every year.

## **Sacred Sharing & Prayer of Saint Patrick**

Now is the time when we share joys, sorrows, and the embrace of our community. Please let one stone from the table represent your deep feelings. Speak if you are moved to speak, then let the stone be held by the chalice as each of us is held by the caring of this community.

Each Sunday School child is encouraged every week to share such joys and concerns. This is part of their religious education. We adults may not be used to so many sharings, and we are happy to witness our youngest generation of Unitarian Universalists develop the confidence and skills they will need to speak their hearts' witness before thousands.

I wondered how to incorporate the feast of Saint Patrick into this service. Patrick is famous for a few miracles and a lifetime of devotion to his church. I read through those prayers to him or attributed by him, and the most famous sounded too martial, too self-righteous... until I read it in my own voice, in the middle of March. I will read it that way as a blessing for our concerns, because sometimes, emotionally, spiritually, we're down to turnips.

Our first stone we place in thanks for the continued healing of our minister, Rev. Lee Devoe.

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I will place this last stone for those joys and concerns which have remained unexpressed.

**The Breastplate of Saint Patrick**  
(first half)

As I arise today,  
may the strength of God pilot me,  
the power of God uphold me,  
the wisdom of God guide me.  
May the eye of God look before me,  
the ear of God hear me,  
the word of God speak for me.  
May the hand of God protect me,  
the way of God lie before me,  
the shield of God defend me,  
the love of God save me.  
Amen

In our UU tradition, we have the same prayer. Please join me in sharing it, Hymn 123, Spirit of Life.

**Hymn # 123 Spirit of Life**

(find lyrics in the *Singing the Living Tradition* hymnal)

**Special Music - February, by Dar Williams**  
**Grace Alden guitar and voice**

**Story: The Birds' Gift**

Sometimes I have trouble keeping my body still when I listen. That's one reason I knit during meetings - so I can pay *better* attention. You'll find pictures on the front and inside of your bulletin to color, in case you need something for your hands to do. Valkyrie and Daroc have crayons to pass out!

This story has beautiful illustrations. Will you please share in telling this story by coming up as you are moved and adding color to these black-and-white pictures?

**The Birds' Gift: A Ukrainian Easter Story**  
**[Eric A. Kimmel](#) (Author), [Katya Krenina](#) (Author, Illustrator)**

Look at us!

Look at these pictures!

Look at us bringing color right into mud season - well done!

There are plenty of stories about how spring comes to be: how the oak king and holly king take turns ruling the forest; how John Barleycorn rises, ripens, and sacrifices himself and lies fallow; how the goddess of spring lives for half a year in the underworld. Or southern continent.

This song retells those stories with new words. How do we help with this one, Grace?

**Special Music - Darkling and the Bluebird Jubilee**

**Homily: Vernal Equinox**

So, I wake up, pull on my warm layer, my boots, grab my toothbrush, and open the door... instead of grey snow, it's rain. What do I say? Mud season.

What does Sgiobalta the Australian shepherd say? MUD SEASON!!!

I planned on a service about equanimity, balance, equinox, moderation, but my dog fixed that for us. In honor of a fresh perspective, we're going to start with some Dog Yoga - ready?  
Stretch out your front quarters,  
Now stretch out your hind quarters,  
Now WAG!  
Feel better?

OK, Pop quiz, what do we remember from last Sunday's sermon about grace? I was in Sunday School so I don't know. Please fill me in - we're going to try to get around to GRACE as the conclusion of what we talk about today. If I know what we're aiming for, there's a better chance we'll get there.

Did you like reading *The Hobbit*? Did you have a favorite part?

Did you know that Professor Tolkien was originally going to have Bilbo slay the dragon? Hero of the story, slayer of the dragon, that's how the story goes - except that it doesn't make sense. Bilbo is a small, untrained hobbit on his very first adventure and this is Smaug the Chiefest and Greatest of Calamities! Even if he were an everyday bad dragon, Bilbo would have no chance. Professor Tolkien did not like what BJ Shabel calls "contrivances for the sake of convenience."

*There was still a company of archers that held their ground among the burning houses. Their captain... shot with a great yew bow, till all his arrows but one were spent. The flames were near him. His companions were leaving him. He bent his bow for the last time. Suddenly out of the dark something fluttered to his shoulder. He started - but it was only an old thrush. Unafraid it perched by his ear and it brought him news. Marvelling he found he could understand its tongue... "Look for the hollow of the left breast as he flies and turns above you!"*

And because we know the captain is an experienced Bowman from an old and honorable line, the old thrush is last of a special kind of thrush, and that last arrow was forged by the king under the mountain of a kind described back in Chapter 1... *that's* how the story goes. Unexpected.

When the keystone *shoonks* into place, or exactly the right word slips into your poem. "The sudden happy turn in a story which pierces you with a joy that brings tears," writes Professor Tolkien, "is a sudden glimpse of Truth"

The first crocus.

"Joy which produces tears because it is qualitatively so like sorrow, because it comes from those places where Joy and Sorrow are at one, reconciled, as selfishness and altruism are lost in Love."

Did you know that turnips, butter, salt, cream, eggs, brown sugar and oats make Finnish turnip cake? Now *that's* unlooked for.

And why are *Faerie stories* the place for that sudden turn? Faerie stories are not in this world, but in a secondary world. We don't have to believe what happens there; but if they're written well, tightly, woven with Arachne's skill, they earn our secondary belief: belief that within the story, the sudden happy turn is true. We glimpse Truth in that world, and we can *feel* the joy in this one.

So much for equinox, equanimity, and moderation. Today I wish for you the sudden, unexpected grace of joy, a stag on the hill, a crocus in your lawn, or your very favorite dessert at pot-luck.

The offering which supports the work of this congregation will be gratefully received.

**Offertory - Barb Tolman, piano** - offering collection lesson.

**Closing words -**

I suppose that Spring is not unexpected. Axial tilt and all that.  
But let that first crocus be your sudden happy turn.

**\*Closing Hymn #64 Oh, Give us Pleasure in the Flowers Today**

(find lyrics in the *Singing the Living Tradition* hymnal)

**Extinguishing the Chalice**

We extinguish this flame,  
But not the light of truth,  
The warmth of love,  
Or the fire of commitment:  
These we carry in our hearts until we meet again.